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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes Leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply “carrying on the fight,” but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of Leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to editor.platypusreview@gmail.com. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society

The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the “Old” (1920s–30s), “New” (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.



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think was the political value of that? Trotsky would do post-assassination? What do you you to write an alternative history, imagining what while he was still alive, in the 30s. What prompted was of course describing what Trotsky was doing this book based on reading Victor Serge, but Serge bit, you mentioned how you were motivated to write going through a “wilight era.” But just to go back a obviously fictional — is *Capitalism, Socialism, and the Cold War*, and he says the Soviet Union is still DH: In your novel, the last book Trotsky writes —

these mistakes? book: who was this man Trotsky? Why did he make Los Angeles. That’s what made me think of the Tijuana was really an appendage of San Diego and lot of people came down from Los Angeles because the coast by boat or you went through the U.S. A to go to Tijuana in the 30s you would have to go up get to Tijuana by roads from Mexico. If you wanted Siberia of Mexico? At that time you could not even he lives on and he gets sent to what would be the if we have Trotsky and he doesn’t get killed but minutes in a car. It made me think, what happens hour on the beach. I could have driven there in 15 hills of Tijuana. I could have walked to Tijuana in an student, if I looked out the front door, I could see the From my mother’s house, where I was a high school Tijuana.” I grew up right by the border of Tijuana. the back of my head I thought to myself, “Trotsky in which is a strange thing to say, but with all that in Finally, the book really came to me as a title, infirmities. How would Trotsky handle that? they get to the age of 70 or 80, they have certain him? He’s a human being, and as people age, after he were to live and get older: what would happen to be interesting to think of what happens to Trotsky if causes you to lose your eyesight. I thought it would macular degeneration, a disease which gradually old myself, older than Trotsky lived to be, and have Two last things. One of them is, I am now 77 years intimate relationship?

need for other people with whom he could have an on with that, where did that fit in his life, his complicated. But I wondered then, what was going personal relationships, marriages — those are all in Coyocacán. So that’s part of his personality, another woman’s house when they were living Van Heijenoort also recalls Trotsky running into Kahlo, which caused enormous pain to his wife. memoir that Trotsky had this affair with Frida bodyguard and secretary? We know from that van Heijenoort’s memoir of his years as Trotsky’s left out one of the primary sources, which is Jean I realized, in the sources that I listed, that I had I was looking at the book again recently, and about who he was.

me want to look into Trotsky and his life, to think views? Those are the principal things that made who wants to be a good friend but has his own this guy? He can’t appreciate and respect a man the psychological sense — what’s going on with made me wonder — not just in the political but in continued to be a loyal friend and translator. That criticizing and attacking Serge, though Serge Trotsky’s work, and Trotsky was constantly working all the time, conscientiously translating Trotsky’s ideas. He was also someone who was who fundamentally agreed with many or most of that really cared for Trotsky. He was a person Serge. Serge loved Trotsky, he was a close friend I should include in this the very way he treated wife Natalia Sedova and Serge do.

mind but not coming up with any better ideas as his trying to grapple with that and not changing his book, and I show him, toward the end of the book, nor capitalist? That’s a big question that I ask in the by a bureaucratic class that was neither socialist Soviet Union into a new form of class society run degeneration — but complete transformation of the so fail to understand the complete — not simply of that is permitted in Soviet Russia. How could he he knew as a young man in Tsarist Russia — none study groups, study circles, the kind of things that organizations; there are no workers’ reading groups, independent; there are no independent workers’ soviets anymore; there are no trade unions that are workers have nothing to do with it. There are no controls the entire economy and runs it and where by a bureaucracy, which doesn’t work at all. This thinks of the Soviet Union as a trade union run what strikes me as a very wooden metaphor. He lifetime completely transformed, and he has Union. Here we have the Soviet Union in his own mistake, which is Trotsky’s views of the Soviet I should say one more fundamental political motivated me to write the book.

and seeing Serge’s critical account of Trotsky that as a problem too. It was reading those notebooks treated as other equal socialists in a democratic group or a democratic movement. That struck me liked him, respected him, wished to work with him, terms of propaganda. Yet many people in the POUJ followers in Spain who could have no impact even in exaggeration, but in any case he had a group of in Spain. That’s probably a nasty remark and an a tiny party, some people said it had two members other independent Marxist thinkers. Instead, he had of the same issue of not being able to work with working relationship with that group, which is part and with the socialist Left, and Trotsky rejected a party, very much involved with the anarchist Left Here we had this party that was a quasi-mass the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM).’

Right of the Communist movement — had formed Communist movement — and what people called the In Spain people from the far Left of the That was a tremendous mistake. broader than his own most narrow chosen followers. did not want to build a party that would have been were committed revolutionaries. It seemed to me he years, who had worked in various countries, and independent Leftist leaders who’d been around for currents or whatever, but many of them had brilliant his ideas and some of whom no doubt had reformist which surely did not have people who shared all of want to work with these larger groups, some of revolutionary movement in Europe, and he did not thinkers. Here was an opportunity, a need for a new would have been broader than his own closest co- of attempting to found a Fourth International that when we get to the later 30s, we see his rejection of what was happening in the Left in Germany. But writings are a great account and brilliant critique the Socialist and Communist parties — all of those the Third Period Communists, of the split between judgement about certain things. Obviously his writings on fascism in Germany, on the problem of somebody else had written — out of his time, that was interesting how Trotsky seemed to be — as

task. But then when I read Serge’s *Notebooks*, it who could take on, it seemed, almost any kind of Revolution together with Lenin. He was a person before that, one of the architects of the Russian later as the founder of the Red Army, and even did not want to build a party that would have been was an impressive leader in his time in many ways: intellectual, a Marxist intellectual. He obviously I have always viewed Trotsky as a great looks at Trotsky.

quite an interesting book because of the way he It’s his notebooks of the 1930s and 40s, and it’s carried them around with me. It’s a big fat book. Serge’s *Notebooks*. I read them for a long time. I years ago. I was in Paris and I picked up Victor

Desmond Hui: Could you give a brief explanation of your background in Trotskyism and what motivated you to write this novel?

An edited transcript follows.
survives the assassination attempt in August 1940.
Trotsky in Tijuana (2020), in which Leon Trotsky Dan La Botz regarding his counter-historical novel members C. D. Hardy and Desmond Hui interviewed On January 21, 2023, Platypus Affiliated Society

Dan La Botz



C. D. Hardy and Desmond Hui

An interview with Dan La Botz
Trotsky in Tijuana

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what we are looking for and how we can get there from here. What kind of a coalition do we need? It seems Sartre is closer than Trotsky to that question in that time, and Sartre was closer to that in the mid-1940s than Trotsky was in the late 30s. That’s the importance. It’s to say, we should try to preserve whatever might be useful out of the past, either as a strategy or as a possible vision for the future. You need both visions and strategies.

CH: The implication from the story seems to be that Trotsky living doesn’t mean that Trotskyism lives, and that Trotskyism in its own way is a stillborn project. It raises interesting questions about what Trotsky represents for us. There’s a term we use in some of the education within Platypus, that Trotsky represents the last man standing of the radicalism of Second International Marxism. What’s compelling about this story is having him stand a bit longer, although it doesn’t amount to a radical change of how the 20th century turns out.

DLB: I try to show in my novel that there are problems with Trotskyism. I take the reader to France and look at the French section of the Trotskyists, and it’s quite sad. You have these two or three brilliant people, one is a great intellectual, Pierre Naville. Another is a great popular leader, Raymond Molinier. You have these various competing people and they can’t really pull together a party. There’s something about the Trotskyist experience that turns them into wonderful spinners of theories and experimental ideas, but they’re unable to cohere a group. Who knows exactly why that is?

And Trotsky’s authoritarianism — the fact that he has to come and intervene in everything that’s happening is a problem. You say, “the last man standing.” I guess that if Rosa Luxemburg had lived, she would be the last woman standing. The question is, what is it that generated these Trotskyist groups? Trotsky became authoritarian himself. I put this in the beginning of the book. I was reading his diaries in the 30s, and he has this quote at the beginning of the novel where he says, “there is now no one except me to carry out the mission of arming a new generation with a revolutionary method.” It’s just incredibly arrogant. Yes, he had a lot of experience; he was a smart guy. There were also a lot of other people out there: the Dutch guy called Maring (Henk Sneevliet), the two Spaniards, Joaquín Maurín and Andreu Nin — there were lots of other smart people. Maybe he was the smartest, who knows? Certainly he had the most experience in a revolutionary movement that briefly took power for a few years in Russia, but it’s an extremely arrogant point of view. Trotsky intervened constantly. It’s not very helpful if you have an organization that’s full of young people and you, as the older person, always come in and tell them what to do. That does not lead them to maturity. And if they fear that they can never stand up to you and tell you you’re wrong, that they have a different idea and say that in the next meeting they will vote for their program against yours, that’s a very problematic situation and that’s what Trotsky created around the world in all of his sections. He had to have the deciding voice. It’s interesting to imagine what would have happened with his staff. I don’t think it would have been much different if he had survived. You would still have an Ernest Mandel, a Michel Pablo; you would still have important figures who would arise. They would also show, whatever you think of Pablo or Mandel, that there are smart revolutionaries out there that will also come along and can propose new theories.



Che Guevara

DH: On that note, do you think Trotskyism was a stillborn project? Would you consider it doomed to fail?

DLB: The Fourth International was a stillborn project, sort of, but you did have periods of revival later. I don’t admire the Fourth International in its period of being a Castroist, Fidelista, Guevarista project of supporting the armed guerrillas of Latin America, but it did have an upsurge there. You do have the Nouveau Parti anticapitaliste,⁸ created by the Trotskyists of the Fourth International in the 2000s. The Fourth International today has many people who have tried to comprehend a new world in a new way, and I have an admiration for them attempting to do that. So on the one hand Trotsky’s project was definitely stillborn; it did not become a mass revolutionary party. On the other hand some of the genetic material was harvested for future revolutionary developments, we might say.

CH: One thing that occurs to me about the last few years of Trotsky’s life and the movement around him is that with the *Transitional Program* (1938),⁹ but also with some of their other initiatives, they’re looking for a new milieu, where to intervene. One thing that comes to mind is that in 1940, Trotsky recommended to the Socialist Workers Party that they should campaign for the Communist Party presidential candidate, which I think was Browder.

DLB: There was a loser, huh? Browder didn’t even get any votes by himself, and the Trotskyists simply would have gone down with him. The Communists weren’t even serious about Browder; they were supporting the Democrats, really.

CH: They said, “vote against the Republicans.”

DLB: Just to give an example of failed alternate projects.

CH: This is a case where the Socialist Workers Party told him, “no, we’re not going to go do that.”

DLB: Good for them.

CH: I don’t think it was simply him calling the tune in terms of those sorts of matters. Obviously, yes, there were bigger disputes.

DLB: I would say it happened in general. I will agree that in some cases people did decide to defy him openly or do other things. I wrote an article on Laurent Schwarz.¹⁰ He was a loyal Trotskyist in the 1930s in the anti-Nazi, underground movement. He says, “I never agreed with him on this and that, but I was afraid to speak out because the movement was so dominated by Trotsky and then by the local leaders.” It’s not really democratic if you don’t feel you can just say what’s on your mind.

DH: What lesson do you hope people will take away from your novel? Did you intend to write this novel as a tragedy? The tragedy of Trotsky? The tragedy of Trotskyism?

DLB: Isaac Deutscher wrote the three-volume tragedy of Trotskyism.¹¹ I wasn’t trying to write it as a tragedy, and I hope it has some comic moments in it, which I think it does. I was trying to explore the questions, who was this man, what were his ideas, and why did he become a man out of his time?

One of the lessons is that in every period you must rethink the nature of the period you’re in. We are right now in a period in which the dominant question is the environment question, the question of the future of humanity. That is the number one question, and it has to be done in certain time limits. Do we think the working class can actually run into the locomotive and seize the controls, as Trotsky would have said? It probably doesn’t matter, because, like the metro, it doesn’t even have a guy there at the controls; it’s somebody else in an office faraway. But, what are we going to do about the environment question? Does that require reaching some compromise with the bourgeoisie, forcing the bourgeoisie to handle this because they have the power? Does this require some democratic alliance on the planet? Do we think that the working class, as it is right now — Marx says the working class will take five, ten, fifty years to become prepared to rule — is this working class going to become prepared to rule in twenty years or whatever the hell it takes to stop the glaciers from disappearing? We have to be thinking about that today.

And we still have to think about the other questions that are more like WWII or WWI, like the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing COVID plague that has beset us, which is like thinking of questions from the 14th century. How are we going to be able to tackle these? We have to have a broad analysis of the state of the world. Trotsky was really good at that in his time, when he was operating in the time he best understood as a young man. But what are we going to do? I guess that’s the question I’d like people to leave with and say, “Hmmm, that’s interesting, Trotsky proved to be wrong.”

My character Ralph Bucek at the beginning of the book says, “my children are growing up in the 1960s in a totally different world than I did. I think there’s revolutionary possibilities in the 1960s, but they’re not like ours were, I don’t know what they are.” Let’s listen to Ralph. **IP**

¹ Workers’ Party of Marxist Unification.

² Jean van Heijenoort, *With Trotsky in Exile: From Prinkipo to Coyoacán* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

³ *The Man Who Loved Dogs*.

⁴ *Partisan Review* 15, no. 3 (March 1948): 288–96, available online at <<https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/heijen/1948/03/balancesheet.html>>.

⁵ People’s Democratic Party.

⁶ Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party).

⁷ Revolutionary Democratic Assembly.

⁸ New Anticapitalist Party.

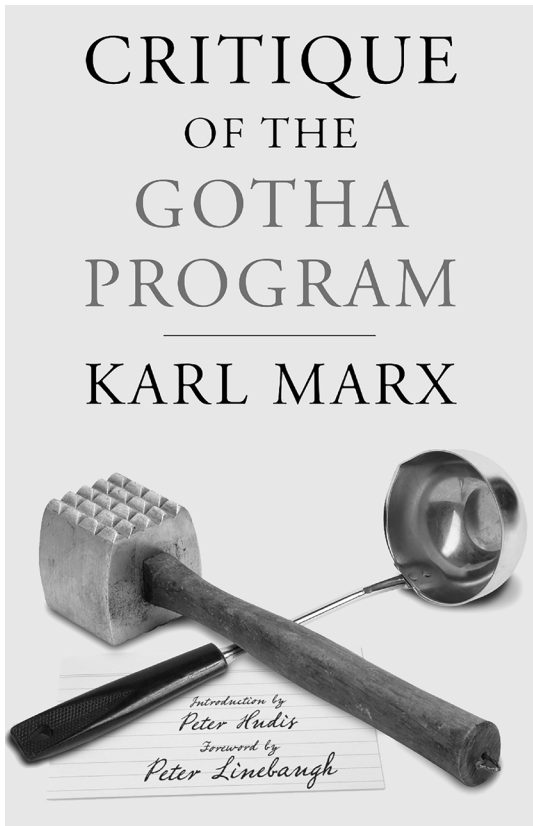
⁹ Also known as *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International: The Mobilization of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power*.

¹⁰ Dan La Botz, “Laurent Schwartz: The Vicissitudes of an internationalist,” *New Politics*, August 22, 2022, available online at <<https://newpol.org/laurent-schwartz-the-vicissitudes-of-an-internationalist/>>.

¹¹ *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky, 1879–1921* (1954), *The Prophet Unarmed: Trotsky, 1921–1929* (1959), and *The Prophet Outcast: Trotsky, 1929–1940* (1963).

A review of Karl Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*

Lars T. Lih



Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Program*, trans. Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff (Oakland: PM Press, 2023).

Introduction

A FEW YEARS AGO, at the book fair of a Left-wing convention, I picked up an edition of Marx’s so-called *Critique of the Gotha Program*, recently reprinted by International Publishers.¹ This edition was originally published in 1938 by a longtime member of the British Communist Party, C. P. Dutt. Although barely over a hundred pages, the International Publishers edition provides the basic supplementary material needed for a genuine historical understanding of Marx’s text: a translation of the draft to which Marx was directly responding, crucial correspondence by Engels, and Lenin’s famous discussion in *State and Revolution* (1917). In particular, the endnotes detailed the substantial changes made to the draft before the program was officially adopted by the Unity Congress at Gotha in 1875 that created a united German socialist worker party.

This edition by Dutt is not my ideal of a full scholarly treatment. (I would like to have seen what the leaders in Germany were writing back to Marx and Engels.) Nevertheless, it can still be recommended as a solid introduction to historical and interpretational issues. The same cannot be said for the new publication issued by PM Press. Contained in this volume are a new translation of the draft program, Marx’s critique and his cover letter: no other supplementary material is provided. We also find an introductory essay by Peter Hudis and an afterword by Peter Linebaugh. Unfortunately, these essays are chock full of factual errors and condescending blanket dismissals of everybody but the infallible Marx. All told, this new publication sets *back* historical understanding of Marx’s text and should be scrupulously avoided.

Who is responsible for issuing this new book in this form, that is, without supplementary material or other useful background information? This turns out to be rather hard to answer. Here is what we can glean from the title page:

Critique of the Gotha Program
Karl Marx
With a new introduction by Peter Hudis
Translated and annotated by Kevin B. Anderson and Karel Ludenhoff

We learn from the acknowledgments that these two items (Hudis introduction and new translation) are also in some sense a product of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization. But note that the title page and the acknowledgments allot responsibility only for these two items, but *not* to the book as we have it. In particular, we do not know if Hudis, et al. take any responsibility for inserting Linebaugh’s Afterword; there is certainly next to no cross-reference between the Afterword and the rest of the book. The copyright for the book is assigned to PM Press. For all these various reasons, I feel reluctant to refer to the new publication as an *edition* of Marx’s classic text: an edition requires an editor (individual or collective) to take responsibility for what is presented to the reader.

To be fair, the aim of the present publication is not really to advance understanding of Marx’s “Critique” either as a whole or in its historical context, but rather to respond to what Hudis feels is a crisis facing the anti-capitalist Left today: “defective conceptions of an alternative to capitalism” (2). The present publication is essentially a manifesto of the Marxist-Humanist group about how this defect can be rectified. The overall argument is of a type that is, I am sure, very familiar to readers of this review. It can be paraphrased as follows. Lassalle — no good. Liebknecht — no good. Bebel — no good. Kautsky — no good. The Gotha Program — no good. The Erfurt Program — no good. The German SPD² — no good. Lenin — no good. Stalin — no good. Rosa Luxemburg — not bad, but even she is dinged for being “a Lassallean when it came to organizational matters” (21). No one understands Marx but me and thee, comrade, and I’m not so sure about thee. But now, since a few of us do finally understand his message, we can have our socialist revolution without any fear that the outcome will once again be “the dead ends and halfway houses that have afflicted Marxists and other revolutionaries over the past 150 years” (35).

I make no comment on the thesis advanced by Hudis that a correct understanding of Marx’s concept of “the law of value” is vital to the success of today’s anti-capitalist Left.³ The Marxist-Humanist group is of course free to make their case on this point. Unfortunately, Hudis feels it necessary to

strengthen his argument by wrapping himself in the cloak of a classic Marxist text. This decision accounts for the very odd insistence that one of the most familiar, most quoted, and most anthologized Marx writings is “forgotten,” “neglected,” etc. What he evidently means to say is that the “Critique” has been (by his lights) persistently *misunderstood*.

But in order to turn Marx’s private marginal notes on a draft program into a repository of hidden wisdom, Hudis has to set the “Critique” into the framework of a melodramatic story: Marx realizes that this entire message has been misunderstood with disastrous consequences and he heroically tries to stave off the collapse of any hope for socialist revolution by uttering profound truths previously overlooked. In other words, Hudis presents what was in fact “a compromise having no particular significance” as “the cardinal principles of the program.” (At the end of this review, I will reveal from whence I derived these “other words.”)

In order to make his story plausible, Hudis has to turn the German socialists — very much including those who had worked most closely with Marx and who had spent years propagating his message — into fools who can only be called “revolutionary” with the help of sneer quotes. (And not only the German socialists! Blurber Paul Mason calls the “Critique” “Marx’s famous hatchet job” — his term, not mine! — “on the nineteenth-century left.”) This contemptuous dismissal of people struggling to found an independent socialist worker party in the inhospitable environment of Bismarck’s Germany is what causes me personally to react to the present publication, not just with sorrow over a collapse of scholarly standards, but with anger and indignation. These feelings are directed in the first place toward the Introduction by Hudis and the Afterword by Peter Linebaugh. Before turning our attention to these essays, however, we must discuss the other component of the present publication, namely, the proposed new translation of Marx’s “Critique.”

Overhyped translation

The present publication comes equipped with a paratext of six blurbs in its opening pages, signed by various writers, punctiliously identified with full academic credentials. Judging from these blurbs, the selling point of the present publication is the new translation. Martin Hägglund (Birgit Baldwin Professor of Comparative Literature and Humanities, Yale University) asserts that “this new translation is both timely and important.” A writer I much respect, Esther Leslie (professor of political aesthetics, Birkbeck College, University of London), tells us that “to re-translate is not only to re-animate old questions in the body of new words, but is also to propel writing towards contemporary exigencies.” Far be it from the present reviewer to downplay the potential clarity provided by improved translation choices! And it must be said at the outset that the translation and notes offered by Anderson and Ludenhoff are at a higher scholarly level than the surrounding essays by Hudis and Linebaugh. Nevertheless, the new translation is overhyped by the blurbers for the following reasons.

First, a small point. The translators tell us that “to our knowledge, this is the first English translation of the version of the Gotha Program to which Marx was responding” (74). (*Not* a ‘version’ but a draft: see discussion below.) Their knowledge is in this case insufficient: as noted above, the C. P. Dutt edition from 1938 has priority.

Furthermore, the translation under review is far from radically “new.” As far as I can see, it is essentially the standard translation with some expressions updated for stylistic reasons, plus a few alternate renderings of abstract terms. The text of Marx’s “Critique” found in Robert Tucker’s classic anthology *The Marx-Engels Reader*⁴ uses the English translation “in editions published by the Foreign Languages Publishing House or Progress Publishers in Moscow.” The opening paragraph of Marx’s “Critique” provides a representative comparison between the text found in Tucker and the one found in the present publication. I have italicized all the changes found in the Anderson-Ludenhoff version.

Tucker Anthology Text
Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists!) as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power. The above phrase is to be found in all children’s primers and is correct insofar as it is implied that labor is performed with the appurtenant subjects and instruments. But a socialist program cannot allow such bourgeois phrases to pass over in silence the conditions that alone give them meaning. And in so far as man from the beginning behaves toward nature, the primary source of all instruments (*Arbeitsmittel*) and subjects of labor, as an owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labor becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth. The bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing supernatural creative power to labor; since precisely from the fact that labor depends on nature it follows that the man who possesses no other property than his labor power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other men who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labor. He can only work with their permission, hence live only with their permission.

Anderson-Ludenhoff Text
Labor is not the source of all wealth. Nature is just as much the source of use values (and it is surely of such that material wealth consists?) as labor, which itself is only the manifestation of a force of nature, human labor power. The above phrase is to be found in all children’s primers and is correct insofar as it is implied that labor is performed with the *pertinent objects* and instruments. But a socialist program cannot allow such bourgeois phrases to pass over in silence the *circumstances* that alone give them meaning. *Only* insofar as man from the beginning

behaves toward nature, the primary source of all *objects* and instruments of labor [*Arbeitsmittel*], as an owner, treats her as belonging to him, his labor becomes the source of use values, therefore also of wealth. The bourgeois have very good grounds for falsely ascribing supernatural creative power to labor, since it *follows precisely from labor's dependence on nature that workers* [*Mensch*] with no other property than their labor power must, in all conditions of society and culture, be the slave of other *human beings* [*Menschen*] who have made themselves the owners of the material conditions of labor. He can only work with their permission, hence *only live* with their permission.⁶

If the reader will indulge me, I will take a close look at another, fairly minor, claim to originality. In both of the above texts, *Arbeitsmittel* is translated as “instruments of labor.” Another possible translation is “means of labor.” Anderson and Ludenhoff opt for “instruments,” but then, oddly enough, they tell us that their rendering of *Arbeitsmittel* as “instruments of labor” is “at variance with most other translations” of the “Critique” (75). Intrigued by this assertion, I made a survey of *Arbeitsmittel* in five distinct English translations of the “Critique” (if there are any others, I would be glad to know):

- Original Soviet translation: “instruments”
- C. P. Dutt, 1938: “instruments”
- *Marx-Engels Collected Works* (English language edition): “instruments” in the opening paragraph “means” for a later occurrence of *Arbeitsmittel*
- Terrell Carver, 1996: “means”
- Anderson-Ludenhoff: “instruments”

As we see, “instruments” is in fact the majority reading, at least in renditions of the first paragraph. To sum up the family tree of these five translations: the first one is basic, while three others make no more than fairly small adjustments. In 1996, Terrell Carver issued a genuinely new translation.⁷ Anderson and Ludenhoff, evidently unaware of the earlier translations found in the Tucker anthology and C. P. Dutt (and overlooking *MECW*’s variable translation choices), unwittingly believe they have made an innovation when in actuality they have only returned to the original English rendering.

No doubt these are small matters. The most important question is whether the new translation helps us understand Marx’s text any better. Rather surprisingly, neither the translators nor Hudis and Linebaugh ever make any specific argument that even those renderings that are somewhat new will lead to any new insight or interpretation. Does it make any difference to our understanding of Marx’s “Critique” if *Arbeitsmittel* is translated “instruments of labor” rather than “means of labor”? No argument or guidance at all is provided by the present publication.

Another example of a novelty is the term *Staatswesen* as used by Marx. Anderson and Ludenhoff give us their rationale: Marx’s word “refers to something far less definite, to the ‘body politic’ (the political body of society) . . . it is something less definite or specific than ‘state.’” No further implication of this new rendering is vouchsafed us.⁸ Personally, I feel this particular innovation is unsuccessful: “body politic” is *too* indefinite. Furthermore, in the passage where we find this term, Marx is making a verbal link between *Staatswesen* and *Staatsfunktionen*. The earlier translations bring out this essential verbal and conceptual echo; the present translators mention it in an endnote, so why does their proposed new translation suppress it? (See, for example, Linebaugh’s citation of this passage on 87.)

The best thing that can be said for the new translation is that some outdated idioms and turns-of-pharse have been dropped, making for smoother reading. I’m afraid, however, that it does not live up to the hype of “an exciting new translation” (David McNally, Cullen Distinguished Professor of History, University of Houston) that allows new insight into a classic text.

A draft, not a program

What Marx called “marginal notes” was later given the title (not by him!) of “Critique of the Gotha Program.” But in point of fact, Marx is *not* critiquing the official party program adopted at the Unity Congress held in Gotha, Germany, in May 1875, but an earlier *draft*. For most discussions of Marx’s remarks, this confusion, although unfortunate, is not vital, since these discussions are aimed at making sense of Marx’s text taken by itself. But Hudis wants to turn Marx’s remarks into a full-scale attack on the newly-formed party itself.

And so he persistently refers to the draft criticized by Marx as “the Gotha Program.” Why is this usage impermissible? First of all, the new party can be held responsible *only* for language that it officially adopted. Second — although many, including Hudis, deny it — there are substantial differences between the draft and the actual program (an example is discussed below). Let me try to explain to Hudis why his procedure is unwarranted. We learn from the Acknowledgments that “the final versions [sic] of Peter Hudis’s introduction [are] the result of several years of discussion in which numerous members and friends of the International Marxist-Humanist Organization participated” (xi). What if I were to publish an early draft of Hudis’s essay and sneer at various imperfections that were later excised as a result of discussion and reflection? Naturally, Hudis would be justly indignant, just as Wilhelm Liebknecht would be indignant if confronted with Hudis’s use of an early draft to launch a sarcastic polemic against Liebknecht’s party.

Marx’s main problem with the draft was that it contained various slogans and shibboleths associated with Ferdinand Lasalle and his followers (as discussed in more detail below). As Marx says in the “Critique,” these slogans are signs “by which the true believers recognize one another” (64). Marx felt that these slogans were really dumb and he did not want to be associated with them. In his remarks, Marx tried to show how stupid these Lassallean clichés were by making what he considered to be *obvious* objections. He was *not* responding to existential threats to the socialist revolution due to profound misunderstandings on the part of his own deluded followers.

Here is a concrete example for illustrative purposes. In the draft program, we find the Lassallean phrase “the proceeds of labor belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society.” Hudis calls this phrase a “declaration” of the Gotha Program itself. Marx took issue with it, Hudis continues, because he “finds it absurd to promise producers that they will receive the full fruits of their labor. The program does so because it conflates wealth with value.” For Hudis, however, any such conflation of wealth and value is a fatal error, an error that accounts for “the failed approach of all social democratic, Stalinist, and market socialist variants of distributive economics.” As a result, “*humanism*, at least in Marx’s sense of the word, vanishes from view” (10–11).

In Hudis’s telling, then, Marx’s message can be paraphrased thusly: You fools! You have failed to understand *Das Kapital* “just when a new and revised French edition of *Capital* came off the press in 1875” (Hudis’s words, 6). You have sabotaged the revolution! Allow me to expand on this profound insight of cardinal importance.

But, from Marx’s point of view, all he wanted to do was show that the Lassallean slogan about the distribution of the *undiminished* [*unverkürzten*] proceeds of labor did not stand up to some obvious objections. Marx’s rhetorical strategy can be more accurately paraphrased thusly: how stupid is Lassalle’s formula about *undiminished* proceeds? It’s so stupid it overlooks the *obvious* consideration that some of the proceeds, even in socialist society, will not be distributed directly to individual laborers! (Of course, as Marx himself says, this objection is somewhat undercut when we realize that “what the producer is deprived of in his capacity as a private individual benefits him directly or indirectly in his capacity as a member of society.”)

Marx’s polemic is thus aimed at Lassalle’s *verbal formula*: “*Undiminished* proceeds of labor” — ha! Hello, Herr Lassalle! What about schools and health services, etc. and etc.? Such is Marx’s polemic, written for a very specific and limited purpose. He had not the slightest intention of ever publishing these notes and he would be shocked at the reverential attitude now displayed toward his allegedly profound insights.

We note in conclusion that Hudis is factually incorrect when he says (as quoted above) that the Gotha Program contains a “declaration” about the “undiminished” proceeds of labor: the official Gotha Program — the only document that can accurately be called “the Gotha Program” — contains no such word. Evidently due to Marx’s mockery or perhaps to some other consideration, the offending word “undiminished” found in the draft is missing in the Program itself. When we realize all this, however, what remains of Hudis’s melodramatic presentation of socialism’s fatal misstep!

Internationalism

Hudis does not simply misrepresent the actual Gotha Program, he also misrepresents and slanders the new party. We shall illustrate with the key issue of internationalism. Marx writes in his marginal notes that the draft contained “Not a word . . . *about the international functions* of the German working class!” According to Hudis, this statement shows that Marx was deeply troubled about the Gotha Program’s “capitulation to nationalism.” Hudis cites with horror “the Gotha Program’s statement, ‘the working class strives for its emancipation first of all *within framework of the present-day national state*.’ This was not the first (or the last!) time that such nationalist verbiage found its way into the program of a “revolutionary” party.”⁹ Then, for the first and only time, he acknowledges that Marx was critiquing a *draft*, and not the official Program:

The Gotha Program was slightly revised by Bebel and Liebknecht after Marx sent them (in private correspondence) his *Critique of the Gotha Program*, and the phrase the “present-day national state” was removed; but that hardly meant that the attitude that produced the error was stamped out. While it may be a stretch to suggest a direct line between the Gotha Program of 1875 and the “Great Betrayal” of 1914, when the SPD voted to approve of World War I, the seeds were clearly planted that far back (11–12).

Let us inquire into this matter. The party led by Liebknecht and Bebel was known as “the Internationalists,” due to its proud association with Marx’s First International (on its last legs by 1875). In 1871–72, these two leaders denounced Bismarck’s annexationist war against France and gave full-throated support for the Paris Commune. For their pains, they were eventually jailed as traitors to the fatherland. In fact, in March 1875, Engels held off sending his own letter on the draft program because Bebel was only released from jail on 1 April! Although Engels also criticized the language of the draft program on this issue, he put his remarks into the proper context by praising the internationalism of the Bebel-Liebknecht Eisenacher party: they “have upheld this principle [of internationalism] in the most glorious way for five years and under the most difficult conditions. The German workers’ position at the head of the European movement is *essentially* based on their genuinely international attitude during the [Franco-Prussian] war; no other proletariat would have behaved so well.”¹⁰

All of this, of course, is of no interest to Hudis. Let us now turn to the actual language of the draft program. I have italicized the language ignored by Hudis in his Introduction: “The working class strives for its emancipation first of all within the framework of the present-day national states, *conscious that the necessary result of its efforts, which are common to the workers of all civilized countries, will be the international brotherhood of peoples*.”

Not great, perhaps, but certainly there is no disavowal of internationalism. What Marx and Engels felt was missing in this language was an acknowledgment of the concrete functions and obligations imposed by internationalism and exemplified by the German socialists’ heroic opposition to the war. Here is the language on this topic suggested by Engels in his above-mentioned letter:

Although the German Worker Party is operating *for the time being* within the state boundaries laid down for it (it has no right to speak in the name of the European proletariat and especially no right to say something false), it is conscious of its solidarity with the workers of all countries and will always be ready in the future, as it has been hitherto, to fulfil the obligations imposed upon it by this solidarity.¹¹

Engels then lists (as Marx does not) the concrete “obligations” that both of them had in mind, including this one: “agitation against the threat or the outbreak of Cabinet-made war, behavior during such wars similar to that carried out in model fashion in 1870 and 1871.” If we compare Engels’s suggested prose with the one and only official Gotha Program proclaimed by the Unity Congress of May 1875, we will see how greatly he influenced the end result: “The socialist worker party of Germany, though acting first of all within a national framework,¹² is conscious of the international character of the labor movement, and resolved to fulfil all the duties which this imposes on the workers, in order to realize the universal brotherhood of men.” What do we learn from these various comparisons? First, the paragraph on this topic was not “slightly revised” but completely rewritten. Second, the final version clearly derives from Engels’s suggested language and responds to his (and Marx’s) basic complaint about overlooking “functions” and “obligations.”

Hudis also asserts that the language found in the (draft!) Gotha Program — “the framework of the national state” — was not the first time such “nationalist verbiage” can be found in revolutionary programs. True that! The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) makes perfectly clear that taking over the *national* state is a necessary and crucial step in the world revolution. Marx famously writes: “Though not in substance, yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeois is at first a national one. The proletariat of each country must naturally first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.” He carefully points out that programmatic demands put forth by radical and socialist parties will be different in different countries, and, in the final section of the *Manifesto*, he goes country by country to give advice to national parties.

The “seeds” of the SPD’s support of the German wartime government are not to be found in any programmatic language but in the *objective tension* created when an internationalist party is forced to make its way in a particular national environment. Hudis’s contemptuous and error-filled attack on the (draft!) Gotha Program is a severe trivialization of the issue.

“A compromise of no particular significance”

I have discussed the “internationalism” issue at length as a central example of the way Hudis distorts the issues. I could therefore pass by the rest of his discussion, but one assertion requires a further comment. I will try to be brief. Hudis writes: “At first [Marx] threatened to cut off all relations with the new party; though he decided not to, within a few years he concluded it would be better if the united organization (now widely heralded as ‘Marxist’) ceased to exist” (1). Hudis backs up the ridiculous assertion that Marx wanted the new party to stop existing with a reference to a letter from 1877 that says no such thing. But let us try to give a serious answer to *why* Marx and Engels did not follow through on their threat to disavow the Program. This question is easy to answer because they tell us themselves. The Gotha Congress in May 1875 was a unity congress and as such faced the typical problem of writing a program that was mutually acceptable. Wilhelm Liebknecht, leader of the Eisenach party, was in the thick of the unity negotiations and he concluded that the party founded by Ferdinand Lasalle would not go through with the merger unless some of the familiar Lassallean shibboleths (for example, “state aid to cooperatives”) were included. He also decided that inserting such language was not too high a price to pay, since the Lassalle “catchwords” (as Marx called them) were relics of the past that would soon fade away.

Marx and Engels did not seriously believe that the Eisenachers (long associated with Marx and Engels) had suddenly adapted Lassalle’s nostrum about state aid, since “almost all, if not all, our [sic] party speakers have been obliged to come out against this state aid in fighting the Lassalleans” (as Engels put it in his letter to Bebel).¹³ Nevertheless, they thought that the price of including Lassalle’s language was in fact too high, because, they prophesied, the outside world would associate them, Marx and Engels, with the despised Lassallean slogans. As Engels put it when complaining about the draft: “A new program is after all a banner publicly raised, and the outside world judges the party from it . . . Our party will have lost its political virginity and will never again be able to come out whole-heartedly against the Lassallean phrases which it will have inscribed for a time on its own banner.”¹⁴

But, as Engels stated in a letter sent several months later, the outside world did *not* judge the party in the predicted way. On the contrary, “both workers and bourgeois and petty bourgeois read into [the program] what ought properly to be in it but is not in it . . . This has made it possible for us to keep silent on this program.”¹⁵ Furthermore, Liebknecht’s calculation about the decay of Lassalle’s concrete proposals (even while Lassalle himself remained a heroic icon) seems to have been borne out. For example, the U.S. Ambassador to Germany, one Bancroft Davis, stated in an official report in 1877 that “in 1875 the union was completed. The Socialists [= Lassalleans] practically surrendered to the Internationalists [= Eisenachers], retaining just enough of their peculiar doctrine to be able to say that they had not yielded everything. It is this united party which fought the great fight in the recent elections.”¹⁶

But we don’t have to take Davis’s word for it. In Marx’s extremely revealing interview with the *Chicago Tribune* in 1879, the Ambassador’s report is discussed at length. (This interview can be found in volume 24 of the English-language *Marx-*

Engels Collected Works, and I heartily recommend it.)¹⁷ Marx’s remarks are nothing less than a de facto endorsement of the Gotha Program four years on. Basing himself on Davis’s report, Marx’s interviewer expressed his opinion that the Gotha platform was “the clearest and most concise expression of Socialism that I had seen.” Marx did not demur and in fact offered a corrected translation of the eleven basic demands found in the Program. But one demand found in the platform was pointedly *not* endorsed by Marx: Lassalle’s nostrum about state aid to cooperatives. Marx patiently explained to his interviewer:

When the reunion took place at Gotha, in 1875, there existed a division among the Social Democrats. The one wing were partisans of Lassalle; the others, those who had accepted in general the program of the International organization, and were called the Eisenach party. That twelfth point [state aid to cooperatives] was not placed on the platform [that is, the eleven basic demands listed by Marx], but placed in the general introduction by way of concession to the Lassallians. Afterwards it was never spoken of. Mr. Davis does not say that it was placed in the program *as a compromise having no particular significance*, but gravely puts it in as one of the cardinal principles of the program . . . The party of Lassalle does not exist. Of course there are some believers in our ranks, but the number is small [my emphasis].

Marx’s dismissal of Ambassador Davis can be applied without change to Peter Hudis.

No doubt Engels and Marx retained a low opinion of the wording of the Gotha Program. But, as we see, Engels and Marx later concluded that their 1875 fears about the *effect* of the Gotha Program were overblown: the Program was *not* seen as a retreat from revolutionary socialism, while the Lassalle formulae inserted into the Program like flies in amber *did* fade away. In 1879, Marx had not the slightest problem in strongly associating himself with the German party (as made abundantly clear by the *Chicago Tribune* interview as a whole). And this is the profound difference in outlook between Marx and Peter Hudis (for whom the German socialists can only be called “revolutionary” with sneer quotes) or Peter Linebaugh (“the hopeless web of error and bad politics found in the Gotha Program”).¹⁸

In fact, the new socialist worker party created at the Unity Congress in 1875 *was* a revolutionary party and the Gotha Program was a revolutionary program. In the midst of Bismarckian Germany, the new independent, socialist, worker party called for a radical transformation of society by turning capitalist property into “the cooperative regulation of collective labor.” It also called for “the elimination of all social and political inequality,” and translated this call into a series of concrete demands for expanded democracy, political freedom, and social welfare that are all still directly relevant today. These demands could not have been realized in Germany without a revolution. Indeed, in 1878, the whole party was outlawed in Germany and remained so until 1890. If today’s Marxist Left cannot find it in themselves to express respect and admiration for such a party — if instead they feel compelled to trash the entire Marxist political tradition at every opportunity — then what good are they? Two cheers for the Gotha Program! |P

¹ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, ed. C. P. Dutt (New York: International Publishers, 1938).

² Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany).

³ “The distinction between actual labor time and socially necessary labor time as a measure of the individual share of the social product is absolutely crucial . . . This *form* of organizing *time* is the cardinal principle of Marx’s concept of communism and serves as the basis of his further outline of a new society in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*” (15, 9; see also 24–25).

⁴ Karl Marx, “Critique of the Gotha Program” (1875), in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, second ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 525–41.

⁵ For our purposes, I have removed Marx’s own emphases. The text found on the MIA seems identical to the one used by Tucker. See <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/>>.

⁶ One can only applaud the effort of the present translators to avoid a sexist translation of *Mensch*, but in the process they lose an important rhetorical effect contrasting the *Mensch* who has only labor power to the other *Menschen* who enslave them. (Anderson and Ludenhoff do not clarify this rhetorical effect by printing the German word.) Translating *Mensch* as “person” seems to solve these problems. Worthy of note: the translators do not remove the sexism introduced by the usual translation of the famous slogan “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (*Jeder nach seinen Fähigkeiten, jedem nach seinen Bedürfnissen!*) (Linebaugh silently corrects; see 83.)

⁷ Karl Marx, *Later Political Writings*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge University Press: 1996).

⁸ To add to the confusion, Hudis does make an interpretive argument by referring to a “mistranslation” of *Staatswesen*, but — he then translates *Staatswesen* as “state functions,” rather than “body politic” (33, see also 13).

⁹ Two inexactitudes: a. this declaration is not found in the Gotha Program; b. the program draft did not give emphasis to the words “*within the framework of the present-day national state*.”

¹⁰ C. P. Dutt cites published writings by Engels that contain similar eulogies of the internationalism of “the socialist German workers” (Dutt’s edition, 106). For a classic discussion, see Vernon Lidtke, *The Outlawed Party: Social Democracy in Germany, 1878-1890* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

¹¹ Dutt’s edition, 29.

¹² Language of draft program: “in Rahmen des heutigen nationalen Staat”; final Gotha Program: “im nationalen Rahmen.”

¹³ Dutt’s edition, 30.

¹⁴ Dutt’s edition, 32–33. In March 1875, a Bismarckian newspaper in Germany gleefully responded to the recently published draft by claiming that the socialists were “renouncing the International” (Dutt’s edition, 101) Marx glumly cites this article and it may have colored his reaction to the draft program as a whole. For comparison, see the 1877 remarks of the U.S. Ambassador to Germany as quoted below.

¹⁵ Dutt’s edition, 37.

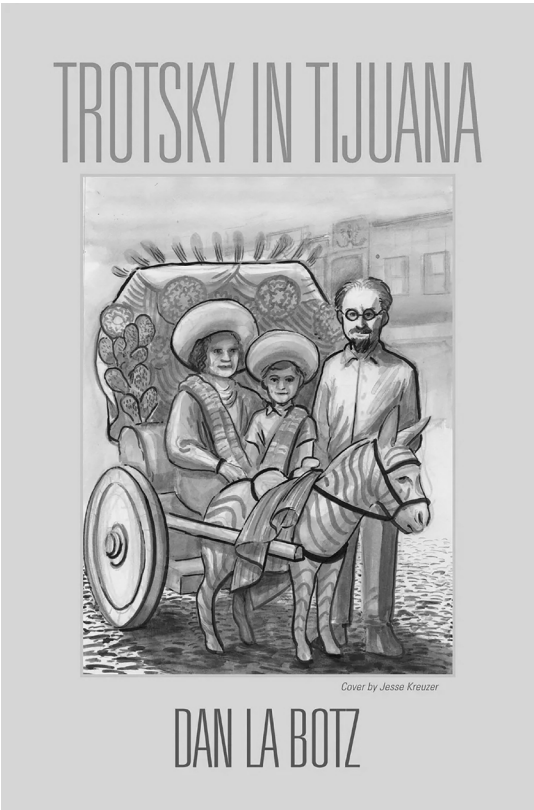
¹⁶ MEGA, 25:1141–42.

¹⁷ Available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/media/marx/79_01_05.htm>.

¹⁸ Linebaugh seems to think that Lassalle was alive and well and living in Gotha: he calls him the “guiding author” of the draft (85, 87).

DLB: The political value was that it allowed me to do something that, as far as I know, no one else has done. There's a bunch of novels about Trotsky, some of them I've read, some of them I couldn't bear to read. The most wonderful one is Leonardo Pardura's *El hombre que amaba a los perros* (2009).³ That is a fantastic novel.

I think it was the idea that I could then push Trotsky further on this Russian question, let him continue to see Russia and the war and so on, and really see the Soviet conquest of Eastern Europe. I brought it up in a pithy, contemporary kind of question. In my novel, he meets this wonderful woman, Rachel Silberstein, my character that I created. Trotsky tells her, "You know the workers and peasants are rising up in these various places," and she is quite correctly not impressed, and she says, "Yes, and the Red Army is raping its way across Europe." We know that that was true. We know that the Russian army is doing that today, and no doubt there's some continuity of history — that it's raping its way across Ukraine. It's one of the war crimes attributed to the Russians then and now. I thought putting that in her mouth, that little sentence, if nothing else, forces us to look at this Russian question another way. By extending his life into the early 1950s, we're able to see him go through all of WWII and having to grapple with what's really happening in the Soviet Union. What's happening in Eastern Europe? What is this brave new world that hath such creatures in it?



The cover of *Trotsky in Tijuana*

C. D. Hardy: One of the things that's so interesting about this project is the counterfactual you pose. It's something that people, or at least people who are into this kind of thing, discuss. What if Trotsky had survived? The other one related to Trotsky is, what if Trotsky had won out over Stalin in the 1920s? I think it's Max Eastman who tells Trotsky that he should have just used the Red Army and taken control of the state.

What makes Trotsky a man out of his time? Imagining Trotsky living into the 1950s and coexisting with Howdy Doody or the Eisenhower presidency is really interesting, and it's hard to imagine the way that it's not with some other contemporary figures. It's not hard to imagine James Cannon or Max Shachtman living until the 1980s — you can kind of telegraph where they would wind up — but with Trotsky he's a product of a specific moment in Marxism.

DLB: That's right. Two things that I think about: if you haven't read it before, you can read van Heijenoort's "A Century's Balance Sheet" (1948),⁴ in which he describes 100 years of the working class, 1848 to 1948. Van Heijenoort had been Trotsky's most beloved secretary. Trotsky valued him and thought highly of him, put him in charge of reorganizing the International, which for Trotsky would be the top job. In the essay, van Heijenoort writes, "this working class can do great things, but it can't rule and it's never going to be able to rule, and I'm out." He leaves the Trotskyist movement, and I don't think he's an activist after that. I imagine in his head he would have been a supporter of democratic, social democratic, or democratic socialist things.

Another way to think about this is Andre Gorz's book *Farewell to the Working Class* (1980). When I first read it I was shocked and didn't agree with it, but then I reread it recently. He wrote that book and then wrote a few other books that are quite interesting. Gorz argues that the working class can no longer be a revolutionary class. But what if we project backwards from what Gorz is looking at? Gorz says one could conceive of the workers as a revolutionary class in the age of steel mills, more or less. If you've read David Montgomery's book *The Fall of the House of Labor* (1988), where he takes you by the hand through steel mills, you would know that in the steel mills in the 19th century the workers are the only ones who know how to do everything; the bosses had not yet got it all figured out. The workers would come in, and the bosses would hire teams of workers, for example, for crucial processes in the middle, like making or running the steel. They were complicated, sensitive tasks. Trotsky was a man of the age of iron and steel. All his metaphors are railroad metaphors: somebody's got to rush to the locomotive and grab the controls from Stalin and drive the train! Other times when mistakes are made he says, the train of history moves and some people fall off the train! He's a man of the age of steel and iron, coal mines, and railroads. That is a way of thinking about industry and the incredibly important role of workers in that period — workers who could understand the whole factory.

I worked in a steel mill in Gary, Indiana. I worked at Gary Works which at one time had 40,000 workers. When I worked there, I think it had 20,000

workers. It was an enormous steel mill: 10 miles long, a mile wide. You've probably driven by and seen the various colors of smoke belching out of various parts of the mill. Even in a mill that big, like the Putilov works in Petrograd that he and others write about, workers knew every corner of that. They knew how everything was done, and so you could imagine them actually running it. As the great American labor leader Big Bill Haywood said, "the boss's brains are under the workman's cap." But the bosses figure that out. We have Harry Braverman's book *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), where he talks about what happened to labor when the bosses came in, took off the cap, went into the worker's brain, and got all that information. They did that through all the time-study stuff that came out of Frederick W. Taylor.

In Taylor's time studies he would sit right next to a guy running a machine and time everything he did, watch how he did it, and make diagrams, make notes, and keep timetables. We have the famous occasion where Taylor tells him, "run this piece of steel to this speed," and the worker will run it 50,000 RPM or whatever it is, and the worker will tell the guy, "it's going to break at 90,000." Taylor would say, "I don't care. Run the steel anyway. I want to see where it will break." The worker would just say, "okay." Maybe it broke where the worker thought it would, but if it broke at 100,000 then Taylor makes a note. He wanted to know where the steel broke, and he also wanted to know where the workers broke. Taylor wanted to know the moment in work where workers could no longer go faster; he wanted to push them to that limit. Trotsky lived in that era, of those factories before everything had gone into files, had gone to headquarters in New York or Chicago, and all that information was in those places. Once that happened, the workers no longer had the personal knowledge or even the collective knowledge in the factory to run that place.

This is the point that Gorz argues: production today is no longer in the workplace, in the hands of workers. It is in the hands of not just the supervisors but the technicians. Today we would say it's in the hands of the high-tech workers and in their computers. Now we can say that these are also workers, but it means that the coordination of a working-class movement would have to involve them in a central way, because they actually know where everything is, they have the power to stop it, etc.

That's one thing — the change in the economy. But maybe also the change in world power dynamics, i.e., the Soviet Union that he knew as a besieged workers' fortress had become the powerful base for the expansion of a new bureaucratic class. Trotsky continued to think of the Soviet Union as being besieged when in fact Stalin had figured out, at the cost of millions of lives, how to industrialize it, how to turn it into at least a new European power. The Soviet Union became a new imperial power that could move west and could simultaneously, weirdly, carry out this "liberation" and then conquest of Eastern Europe. Trotsky didn't grasp the new political dynamics. This is a presumptuous thing of me to say about the guy who was one of the best heads for grasping international political dynamics, but he missed it. On the other hand, we should note in 1924 in a speech to the meeting of the Third Congress of the Communist International, he says it's very clear, the writing is on the wall: you can see that a war is coming between the U.S. and Great Britain! So Trotsky didn't always get it right, and he didn't get it right about the late 40s or even the mid 40s. He didn't get it right, for example, in the late 30s when the invasion of Finland took place! He couldn't deal with a giant nation attacking a little nation. I thought we socialists say we stand for democratic self-determination, the right of peoples to defend themselves, etc. He couldn't deal with that. Or see the Hitler-Stalin pact, the division of Poland between Hitler and Stalin: Trotsky didn't come out on the right side of these questions; he couldn't understand how to deal with them. Pushing that into the future allows us to try to work it out a little further.

DH: On Trotsky being a man out of his time, you said it was because of how the working class was organized at that time. But of course Trotsky himself wasn't working class; he came from wealthy landowners. One of the things that stuck with me after reading your book was your portrayal of what it meant to be a revolutionary, what it meant to be Trotsky. He's sitting at a table and there's a hundred different journals from all around the world, and he has three people who are translating what he's saying and what he's writing into three different languages. I'll push back on that: was it just the fact that the working class had more knowledge at that time that made Trotsky who he was? It seems like Trotsky wasn't just working class; he was a political revolutionary. What allowed Trotsky to be a political revolutionary?

DLB: What's the relationship between his class background and his politics?

DH: It's not just his class background. He was a professional revolutionary; it didn't matter that he came from a certain background. In terms of what he was, he was distinct from the working class.

DLB: In that Bolshevik milieu that Trotsky and others were in, there were people with bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, working-class, or peasant backgrounds; some were technical workers; some of them also assumed the same kind of jobs that Trotsky had. Look at Stalin: Stalin comes from a terrible family, a poor working-class father who was an abusive alcoholic. He takes the only road open for a poor person and goes to the seminary. Stalin becomes a reader; he loves books. If you read the biographies of Stalin — and I've read a bunch of them — he comes to love an intellectual life; he loves poetry. Then Stalin comes into the workers' movement, which becomes a vehicle for a person with

intellectual as well as political aspirations. This was also true in the U.S. — all over the world too — for immigrants. Immigrants came from other countries trying to figure out the U.S. If you got involved in the Communist Party or Trotsky's Communist League or Socialist Workers Party of that era, it became a vehicle for you to learn to understand the country, to read, to write, to be around intelligent people, to have intellectually stimulating discussions, to develop strategic ideas, and to figure out how to come to power. It's not just that he was from a well-off family; being from that kind of family no doubt helped; it gave him a certain leg-up, but it was also being near Odessa, being near a big city with its stimulating life. We also have the example of Mao Zedong who came from a peasant background — better-off peasants but in a very backward country — and Mao finds himself in Shanghai and he's able to become a revolutionary.

There are various things that make people revolutionaries. I was in Indonesia for a while, and I wrote a book on Indonesia, but I got some things wrong in it, so I'm somewhat embarrassed about it. In researching that book, I talked to an Indonesian revolutionary who was in the Partai Rakyat Demokratik,⁵ and he said when people come to the big city, the women for the first time have some money in their pockets; they have some independence. These are Muslim women not under the thumb of their father, and there's no husband around. The men there can suddenly go watch pornography; that is, there are many things in the big city that break you from your past and allow you to become something else. Especially considering that 90% of the people in the world were peasants when Trotsky started, maybe 80% when he finished — it was still 80% not long ago.

I did write about Stalin in that book. What does Stalin do? He gets up in the morning, he goes to his desk, he reads his papers. He didn't have the facility with languages but he could employ plenty of people to translate everything and send him the reports of everything, but it's just like the executive of a corporation. The corporate executive has his secretaries, his translators, and all the resources at his disposal to run a big organization. Running a big organization means you have a lot to handle, a lot of moving parts. Being a revolutionary is also trying to run a national organization.

I was involved in a small socialist group in the 1970s called the International Socialists. I don't think it ever surpassed 300 members, but with our few hundred members we started to think about building a national presence in different labor unions. Having that experience expands your mind: you're now trying to think about the whole country in a practical way. Students of history, political science, or sociology sit down and read a book and think about big things like this, but they're not usually also trying to simultaneously do something in the world about those things.

CH: What you said, following Gorz and Braverman to an extent, is that there's a changed relationship of dependency between the workers and the bosses that happens, and that Trotsky might not be fully aware of or have the political tools to respond to that.



James Burnham

DLB: It's interesting that a lot of the people who were in and around the Trotskyist movement, some of whom became adversaries of Trotsky's, were thinking about this question: what's the relationship between the capitalist class and the managerial class? This whole theory about the managerial class — James Burnham was in the Trotskyist movement and then goes off and becomes the famous sociologist of this. It's interesting that they are trying to explore that. Trotsky's idea is that the Soviet Union's bureaucracy is like the trade-union bureaucracy, but when they're trying to think about what is happening with this bureaucratic development in every level throughout the world, maybe in certain ways they're getting closer than he is. I don't know. I don't have an answer to that question. That belongs in the next novel.

CH: Farrell Dobbs put it well, and he's someone who had a lot of experience with trade-union bureaucracy, even if the form that it took under International Brotherhood of Teamsters leader Dan Tobin was primitive compared to what would come later. But for him the principal objective of socialist participation in unions was educational. It was that through these struggles the working class would have to confront the fundamental question of state power; they would realize that there isn't a purely economic solution to their issues. Trotsky's last essay "Trade Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay" (1940) shows that for him this bureaucratic drift and specialization pose the same question, but maybe more acutely.

DLB: That's an important essay. It's quite a brilliant one and it raises interesting questions because it's

about the tendency towards the stratification of unions, of state intervention into unions. I spent a lot of my intellectual career writing about Mexico, and one of the things I learned in Mexico, studying workers in unions, is that they have a completely different labor-union system. Our U.S. labor-union system was based on the capitalists capturing the labor bureaucracy in their industry. If the steel corporations go to testify in Congress about the need for steel protection, all the union officers go with them. They're partners, and they could be partners in productions — the team concept of the 1980s–2000s in the auto industry and others — whereas in Mexico the labor bureaucracy is loyal to the state. Perhaps not anymore; a lot has changed since the first PAN⁶ government in 2000. Before that, the labor unions were completely dependent on the state. Now, the state wanted them to get along with the capitalist class, but if push came to shove, they would be with the government.

DH: In your book you bring up Serge and a few, let's say, anti-Stalinist socialists, dissidents, like Shachtman, who came up with the bureaucratic collectivism thesis, but also Jean-Paul Sartre, who writes a fictional note to Trotsky asking for an alliance. You said earlier that you thought Trotsky was too sectarian, but what do you make of the fact that these projects actually did not end up leading to a successful world revolution? Neither Shachtman nor Serge nor Sartre led a proletarian revolution, or even built an international.

DLB: I'm very interested in Sartre's Rassemblement démocratique révolutionnaire (RDR).⁷ I think that was a very great experiment. It was the right thing to do, and he did it with two of the leading Trotskyist Leftists. The RDR was an important opportunity; it wanted to become the political expression of the Resistance. Here's a time at the end of WWII where there's a huge hope for a socialist world by an enormous part of the working class — not all of it, but certainly France and Italy. Stalinism controls too much of it, so here come Sartre and these other people with a project to try to attract workers in the Stalinist parties and bring them into a new socialist movement opposed to capitalism and Stalinism. What a great idea! Even if that also failed. I believe that Trotsky would have written exactly the letter I have him write rejecting the alliance, except maybe even more contemptuous and venomous than the letter I wrote for him.

So why did all these efforts fail? They failed because the working class had been so devastated. WWI and WWII succeeded in wiping out almost the entire working class that Trotsky had known. Those generations of workers, created since about 1870 that had been growing into maturity in the 1880s–1910s, who had been able to put forward revolutionary projects in a half-dozen countries with serious possibilities — Russia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, these are countries where there were chances — that revolutionary working class was wiped out.

In the post-World War world, the new working classes that were created were different. We should first say that the American working class became contained by the prosperity of the U.S. "The American working class" — I sound like Herbert Marcuse here, but I think that's sort of right. The wealth and power of the U.S. made it difficult for American workers to see the necessity or possibility of a revolutionary movement. They didn't see the necessity by and large. They weren't all happy. My mother was a grocery checker. My family fell through into a couple of years of real poverty when my mother divorced as a young woman. There were many millions of especially black and Latino workers who were living in poverty, but they did not feel the necessity of revolution. Later some blacks maybe do, but the whole country is not moving in that direction the way things had been going in Europe before the wars.

On the reconstitution of the European classes, they are reconstituted in nations where capitalism is reestablished on a new basis. As we all know, because of the war's destruction, there were green-fields where you could build factories in Germany or in Japan that could be completely modern. In the steel mill I worked in, you first made the steel, then you poured an ingot, then you brought the ingot back and you reheated it, and ran the ingot on a roller line. But in the Japanese factories, you poured the steel, and it just began the whole process and ended up coming off as rolled steel at the end of the line. They got rid of all those stages and steps. Some of these countries are quite rich: Japan, Germany. South Korea becomes quite rich. All the European nations in general have a very high standard of living. In Asia, the radical transformation of peasant societies, but above all in China of course, meant that the working class was being reconstituted, reborn, rebuilt, and that process has maybe never ended. Are we still in the reconstitution of the post-WWII working class? I don't know. On a world scale, I guess we are.

DH: To elaborate on my question, what purpose do you see in emphasizing these roads that Trotsky could have taken if it seems that in reality these roads were not successful?

DLB: Let's imagine Trotsky woke up one morning and said, "What an idiot I was! I should have built the Fourth International as people suggested, with elements of these small mass parties that existed then, and Sartre's giving us another chance, and I should throw my intellectual and moral weight into this project." Might that have made that possible? Of course that's only in the fictional world because in the real world it didn't happen. So why mention them in fiction when in the real world they didn't work? Partly it's because you have to mention things if you think they are morally superior. You have an obligation to say this would have led to a more moral, better world, and we should affirm that, if only as a possible guide to future thinking about

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